

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 03226

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MARR, MILI, XF, IS, LE, US
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: THE NEW YORK VIEW OF 425

SUMMARY: THE MISSION HAS GIVEN CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT TO THE QUESTION RAISED IN BEIRUT'S THOUGHTFUL ANALYSIS OF WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WE OUGHT TO DO IN THE NEXT MONTH REGARDING THE UNIFIL PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON (BEIRUT 4708). WE BELIEVE THAT THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION SHOULD BE BASED ON MORE THAN JUST AN EVALUATION OF THE DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING RENEWAL OF THE UNIFIL MANDATE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL NEXT MONTH, IMPORTANT AS THEY MAY (OR MAY NOT) BE. WE SHOULD ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE MORE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF OUR INTEREST IN THE EFFECTIVENESS, PRESENT AND FUTURE, OF UNIFIL IN FULFILLING ITS MANDATE AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF UNIFIL INACTION ON THE ATTITUDES OF THE ISRAELIS AND THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA AS WELL AS LEBANESE AND PALESTINIANS. THESE IN TURN HAVE A BEARING ON THE PROSPECTS FOR OUR EFFORT TO WORK OUT LONG-TERM STABLE ARRANGEMENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON, IN BEIRUT AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST GENERALLY. END SUMMARY.

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1. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT IT APPEARS THAT THE LEBANESE AND ISRAELIS, AS WELL AS OURSELVES, BELIEVE UNIFIL HAS DONE REMARKABLY WELL UNDER DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES IN ESTABLISHING A CREDIBLE PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON, ALTHOUGH NOT YET ABLE TO ESTABLISH ITS AUTHORITY IN THE BORDER ZONE. OUR DEBATE OF THE LAST MONTH AS TO WHETHER

A PRIORITY EFFORT SHOULD BE GIVEN TO MOVING THE LEBANESE BATTALION SOUTH BEFORE TRYING TO STRENGTHEN UNIFIL'S PRESENCE IN THE BORDER AREA HAS NOW BEEN OVERTAKE BY EVENTS. IT SEEMS TO US MORE IMPORTANT AT THIS STAGE TO REACTIVATE THE LATTER EFFORT.

2. AN AUGMENTED UNIFIL PRESENCE IN THE BORDER ZONE HAS SIGNIFICANCE IN BOTH POLITICAL AND OPERATIONAL TERMS. ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL THIS IS THE REQUIREMENT OF THE MANDATE AND IT SEEMS TO US THAT WE SHOULD DO ALL WE CAN TO SEE TO IT THAT IT IS CARRIED OUT. WE SEE NO REASON TO THINK THAT THIS WILL BE ANY EASIER IN OCTOBER THAN IN AUGUST. WHAT DO WE GAIN BY INERTIA AT THIS STAGE? UNIFIL'S ON-THE-GROUND ROLE IS NOT TO SEEK AN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA TO DISARM THEM, TO CLOSE WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA TO DISARM THEM, OR TO CLOSE THE GOOD FENCE AS THE ISRAELIS AND MILITIA SEEM TO BELIEVE. IT IS TO START TO SET THE STAGE FOR NEGOTIATION OF ARRANGEMENTS BY WHICH THE GOL WOULD EVENTUALLY REAFFIRM ITS AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH. THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE THE GRADUAL EXPANSION OF THE UNIFIL PRESENCE IN THE BORDER ZONE. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF POCKETS IN THAT ZONE IN WHICH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA PRESENCE IS THIN AND/OR IN WHICH THERE ARE A FEW OR NO CHRISTIAN VILLAGES. THOSE ARE THE POCKETS INTO WHICH UNIFIL COULD NOW ENTER WITH NEW OPS AND PATROLS WITHOUT

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PROVOKING A CONFRONTATION.

3. WE TEND TO AGREE WITH BEIRUT'S ASSESSMENT THAT EVEN IF THESE STEPS ARE NOT TAKEN THE MANDATE IS LIKELY TO BE RENEWED, THOUGH WE CAN READILY IMAGINE AN ATTACK ON THE MANDATE STIMULATED BY THE SOVIETS AND LED BY RADICAL ARABS. THE PLO ATTITUDE WOULD PROBABLY BE CRUCIAL. WESTERN TROOP CONTRIBUTORS HAVE REASONS OF THEIR OWN FOR KEEPING THEIR FORCES IN THE AREA. WE ARE LESS CERTAIN ABOUT NIGERIA AND SENEGAL. THE ISSUE FACING US, HOWEVER, IS GREATER THAN JUST OBTAINING A RENEWED MANDATE FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL. OVER THE LONG RUN UNIFIL EFFECTIVENESS WILL BE DIMINISHED IF IT IS PERCEIVED ON BOTH POLITICAL AND OPERATIONAL LEVELS AS HESITANT, PASSIVE, AND ONE-SIDED. THIS WILL NOT MAKE IT ANY EASIER FOR IT TO MOVE INTO THE BORDER ZONE AFTER THE MANDATE IS RENEWED.

4. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE ISRAELI ATTITUDE TO UNIFIL INVOLVES PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS CARRIED OVER FROM ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCE WITH UNEF IN 1967. EVEN THOUGH WEIZMAN NOW ACKNOWLEDGES THAT UNIFIL IS DOING A GOOD JOB, AS IS

NOTED IN TEL AVIV 10518, THEY CLEARLY HAVE DOUBTS AS TO UNIFIL'S CAPABILITY TO KEEP PALESTINIANS OUT OF THE BORDER ZONE OVER THE LONG RUN. THESE DOUBTS CAN ONLY INCREASE IF UNIFIL IS SEEN AS WEAK AND FEARFUL IN ITS DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL AND THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA. MOREOVER, THE THREAT OF RENEWED EFFORTS BY THE PALESTINIANS TO MOVE INTO UNIFIL'S AREA OF OPERATION AND TO TAKE CONTROL (MUCH AS THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA CONTROL THEIR ENCLAVES)

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INCREASES UNDER THESE CONDITIONS - A DEVELOPMENT CERTAINLY NOT DESIRED BY ISRAEL ANY MORE THAN BY US, UNIFIL OR THE GOL.

5. BEYOND THESE CONSIDERATIONS IS THE NEED FOR US TO KEEP IN MIND OUR LARGER OBJECTIVE -- TO WORK OUT SOME KIND OF DURABLE AND COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION FOR SOUTH LEBANON. EVEN IF THE UNIFIL MANDATE IS RENEWED IN SEPTEMBER, WE CAN EXPECT MORE SERIOUS QUESTIONING NEXT MARCH IN THE COUNCIL. VERY FEW OF THOSE INVOLVED LAST MARCH EXPECTED THAT THE SITUATION IN LEBANON WOULD STRAIGHTEN ITSELF OUT IN SIX MONTHS, BUT IF THERE HAS NOT BEEN REAL PROGRESS IN ONE YEAR, THEN THERE WILL BE A GENERAL TENDENCY TO THROW UP ONE'S HANDS AND WALK AWAY. WE DO NOT OURSELVES ENVISAGE UNIFIL AS A PERMANENT ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM. INSTEAD OF DEALING ONLY WITH

THE TACTICAL QUESTION OF RENEWAL, THEREFORE, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE ENGAGING ALL THE PARTIES, BUT MOST PARTICULARLY THE ISRAELIS, IN A MORE FUNDAMENTAL DISCUSSION
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OF LONG-TERM ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOUTH LEBANON. OUR HAND IN THESE DISCUSSIONS WILL BE STRENGTHENED IF WE CAN GET BEYOND THE PRESENT SITUATION IN WHICH ISRAEL AND THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA ARE IN DE FACTO CONTROL OF THE BORDER ZONE WITH ONLY A MINIMAL UNIFIL PRESENCE. IF WE CAN GET TO THE POINT WHERE WE CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT THE ZONE IS SAFE AND SECURE FOR CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS BECAUSE UNIFIL IS HELPING TO MAKE IT SO, WE PERHAPS CAN GET THE ISRAELIS TO START THINKING ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT TO DO BEYOND DEFENDING AND PROPPING UP HADDAD.

6. THE CURRENT SITUATION, WHILE EVIDENTLY SATISFACTORY TO THE ISRAELIS, OBVIOUSLY CANNOT CONTINUE INDEFINITELY. THE LONGER IT EXISTS, AND THE MORE ENTRENCHED AND ISOLATED FROM THE REST OF LEBANON THE CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES BECOME, THE MORE DIFFICULT WILL IT BE TO FIND A NONVIOLENT WAY TO MOVE TO AN ENDURING SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM - ONE WHICH WOULD SATISFY ISRAEL'S SECURITY NEEDS BUT ALSO BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE LEBANESE AS A WHOLE. THIS CAN ONLY COME GRADUALLY, BUT IN OUR VIEW THE SOONER A START, HOWEVER SMALL, IS MADE, THE BETTER.

7. FINALLY, THE KEY ROLE PLAYED BY UN FORCES ON ISRAEL'S OTHER BORDERS - AND IN FACT THE KEY ROLE THEY PLAY IN CYPRUS AND (WE HOPE) IN NAMIBIA AND ELSEWHERE IN THE FUTURE - ARGUES FOR GREAT CARE IN ALLOWING A SITUATION TO PERSIST IN WHICH THE UN AND US BACKING FOR THE UN ARE GENERALLY PERCEIVED AS FEEBLE AND INEFFECTUAL. OUR BOLD ACTION IN PROPOSING AND PUSHING THROUGH RES 425 EARNED US A GOOD DEAL OF CREDIT EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO THOUGHT IT TACTICALLY UNWISE OR UNSOUND. WE HAVE A NATIONAL INTEREST IN NOT ALLOWING THIS MODEST BUT
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SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT TO GO SOUR AND COMPLICATE OUR EFFORTS TO BRING OUR INFLUENCE TO BEAR FOR CONSTRUCTIVE SOLUTIONS TO OTHER PROBLEMS, RELATED OR UNRELATED.

8. IN SUM, WHILE RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR CAUTION,

WE SEE DANGERS IN ALLOWING THE STATUS QUO TO CONTINUE
BY INERTIA AND MANY GOOD REASONS FOR A RENEWED EFFORT
ON OUR PART TO THICKEN THE UNIFIL PRESENCE IN THE
BORDER ZONE IN THE MONTH AHEAD. LEONARD

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